

Interviewer: Hi, my name is Amos Patrick. I've been living in Estes Park for the last five years and personally, one of my favorite things about living in Estes Park is I get to cross paths and sometimes even share a rope with some of the big names in climbing. One of those guys is Chris Reveley and I've been fortunate enough to actually go out and share a rope with Chris and we've had some adventures and so today I'm going to interview Chris. This is for an oral histories project that's being put on by the [Estes Park] Museum and the Estes Park Library. [This interview is also available in video format, filmed by Brian Brown. The interview was transcribed by Tom Williams with the assistance from Alicia Mittelman.]

Interviewer: Let's start out with some formalities. Can you tell me your full name?

Chris Reveley: Christopher Garland Reveley.

Interviewer: Your birthdate and where were you born?

Chris Reveley: I was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey, far far from here, on January 12, 1952, that makes me 60, almost 61 years old.

Interviewer: How did you get into climbing?

Chris Reveley: Oh boy, I remember the moment actually. I was a freshman at the Engineering School at the University of Colorado in Boulder. And I walked out of my dorm room and I looked down the hall and there was this guy with long blond hair and these funny blue boots on, this would have been 1970, traversing along the baseboard in the hallway. Making moves between the door jams and standing on the little half inch baseboard in these funny shoes. And I asked him, I said, "What are you doing?" And he showed me and told me.

Interviewer: Who was that?

Chris Reveley: That was Richard Lindvall. He looked like some kind of a Norse god; long blond hair, big blond mustache, and he took me on my first few climbs and was really very much a mentor and a teacher. Then on one unfortunate day in Boulder Canyon he took a long fall and almost hit the ground. He pretty much retired from climbing and gave me all his stuff [chuckles] at which point I'd go to Eldorado Springs and stand around the parking lot waiting for victims. People would get out of their cars with the same kind of stuff and we'd lie to each other for a few minutes and then go off and do climbs that were way beyond our limits.

Interviewer: So in those early days of climbing, where were you climbing at, like primarily?

Chris Reveley: Where?

Interviewer: Yeah, like what areas?

Chris Reveley: Eldorado Springs and Boulder Canyon.

Interviewer: And did you have any other partners you were climbing with a lot back then?

Chris Reveley: After I kind of got going, people like Jim Michael, Larry Marquardt; Paul Thombs who was another friend of mine who also went into medicine later in life. Those were sort of my early partners who I made great great great strides with.

Interviewer: And so this was the early 70s, so was your rack like pitons back then or were you using stoppers at that point?

Chris Reveley: Well, nuts as we called them or chocks were first starting to arrive from Britain where they'd been using them for a long time. Then of course the story was that they were walking along the rail road tracks in Wales and found these little machine nuts that had fallen off the trails and threaded them with slings and then put them in the cracks and used them to clip into for protection. We had a few of those, mostly just individual nuts threaded with slings and then pitons. So the first time I climbed, for example, the Ant Hill Direct Route in Eldorado Springs, we were still banging in pitons and that would have been 1971.

Interviewer: So who are some of the big names at the time when you were starting to climb? Like who were the big guys climbing?

Chris Reveley: That's a complicated history, not very many names but a little complicated. Pat Ament first thought of the idea of free climbing difficult, what had previously been artificial routes. So he really sort of got the ball rolling. He had a unique style at the time that wasn't ultimately consistent with what we came to call free climbing, but he was making it up. He was a pioneer. He was learning how to do this and the idea of going up a climb and not touching in any way or relying on the existing equipment or gear that you had placed for resting or upward movement was, hadn't been clearly defined yet. Probably was in Britain, in Europe, but not in Eldorado Springs. So he really, he was a friend of Royal Robbins. Royal kind of helped him along with this and was a friend and mentor to him also. But Pat really paved the way for much of what came later. As did of course the older guys like Tom Hornbein and Dale Johnson and others who pioneered the Big Eight climbing routes which we subsequently began to look at as free climbs. After Pat Ament, the big names were Jim Erickson, Duncan Ferguson, and this is the Boulder scene right, Bob Ritz, Dudley Chilton. I guess the list is longer but they're not coming to mind right now. Art Higby, people who ultimately became my good friends and climbing partners.

Interviewer: So who were some of the climbing partners you had that you felt like really shaped how you ended up, like your style of climbing.

Chris Reveley: Well I think Erickson and Duncan Ferguson, Jim Erickson and Duncan Ferguson. Erickson really took this business of free climbing to an extreme. He ultimately arrived at a place where he didn't use chalk, he would only use chalk if he was bouldering or climbing in a gym, and there weren't any climbing gyms in those days. And not only that, he would go up to free climb an aid route in Eldorado Springs for example, many of which he did the first free assents of. And he would climb up and get to the crux, the hard part, and if he couldn't do it he would climb back down, reverse all the moves. If he even weighted the rope or fell, he was done. So anytime you see a guide book that says, "Jim Erickson did the first free ascent," it was in the purest style. He would never go back and attempt a route again if he had fallen or had to rest on the rope. That was what he called, "Being tainted." If you were tainted, you were done. And he would stand there all day and belay other people who'd try it in other styles, not quite as pure as his, but he would never try to lead it again. Duncan Ferguson at the same time, he had been an athlete in high school, a pole vaulter and a swimmer, and he brought, in some ways an even more pure style to the climbing scene, where he adopted everything that Erickson did plus was bold in a way that nobody had seen before. So leading out far above protection on very difficult climbing, what was considered difficult at the time.

Interviewer: What were the grades like, what was a difficult climb back then?

Chris Reveley: You know, 5.11 was kind of the top of the line in those days. It turns out that some of the climbs we did in those days might have 5.12 ratings but we didn't call them that. They were just damn hard. So actually Erickson and I got into this habit of rating everything 5.9 plus until somebody else did it. [laughter] And then we'd find out how hard it really was. Also on to the scene, very much in the scene at that time were Roger Briggs, Bill Briggs, and somewhat later, David Breashears. All those people made huge contributions. Roger started climbing quite young, I'm thinking 16 or 17 and came under the influence of people like Layton Kor and his brother started at the time, a little bit after Roger I think. Of course they have written a big part of the history on the east face of Longs Peak.

Interviewer: So you said you were part of the Boulder scene to start with, do you remember, did you guys start coming up here to Estes? Do you remember your first experience up here in the Estes area?

Chris Reveley: Yes, I do. My friend Paul Thombs who I mentioned before and I, and probably Richard Lindvall came up and did the Pair Buttress route because we thought it was something that was probably within our ability at the time, it was 5.8 which is kind of out there. It's probably harder than that. So we did that climb and while going up it I looked over the edge and

I saw a very steep climb below the first pitch off to the left over in the dihedral side where Howling at the Wind and Fat Saving the Elbows [?], which turned out to be another climb that we did which was much much harder but we kind of really didn't know it at that time. Yeah, we came up and climbed on the Book. Probably did Osiris, probably did Pair Butress, probably climbed an easy route on Twin Owls. Then sort of a year later were coming up here and trying to do those hard crack climbs on Twin Owls, like Crack of Fear and Twister and Tiger's Tooth.

Interviewer: Then when did you start venturing up into the Park?

Chris Reveley: I think, and again this could be historical fiction, but I think I didn't climb much in the Park until I met my friend George Hurley. George did the first ascent of The Titan, I believe, a big sandstone pillar down in southern Utah with Layton Kor and Huntley Engles. They climbed the first funded climb in America. National Geographic gave them \$200 to go buy gas and get down there and climb it. But George at the time was in his 40s and was doing very hard climbs for the time. So he and I did somewhat were considered hard 5.10, 5.11 routes in Eldorado Springs. Then we started coming up here and we climbed Stetner's Ledges and we went in and climbed on Spearhead and probably others that I can't remember. But he was a great influence for me too.

Interviewer: As I understand, you were a ranger for Rocky Mountain National Park.

Chris Reveley: Yeah, that came later. I worked as a guide here in town for Michael Covington's Fantasy Ridge Climbing Guide Service. George Hurley and I both did, starting in about 1975.

Interviewer: How many years did you guide?

Chris Reveley: I guided for probably, '75, '76, '77, and then I started working for the Park, I think in '78.

Interviewer: What kind of clients were you guiding?

Chris Reveley: It was mostly teaching beginning climbing classes and then once in a while we'd have a day with one or two clients to go up and climb the Petit Grepon or something on Hallett. The classics, maybe a route on Sundance, the longer routes on Lumpy Ridge, people were really interested in that. We tried to, between Westbay and Douglas and Covington and me and George, we tried to mix it up so one person didn't get stuck taking groups of 12 people up the Cables Route on Longs Peak day after day.

Interviewer: So it was a lot of technical climbing, is guided.

Chris Reveley: Yeah, yeah. And I still run into people in random places, in stores and things who will recognize me and say, "I did my first climb with you."

There were a lot of people. Rock climbing was starting to be something that people were interested in.

Interviewer: Was there a certification process for being a guide back then, or was it?

Chris Reveley: No, you just guided.

Interviewer: About how often did you guide people, like was it every day?

Chris Reveley: In the summer we were working almost every day. We'd get out, probably meet clients at 7:00 or 8:00, go off climb all day and make it back by 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon. Once in a while you would have a day off where you could go climb something on your own or go running in the hills or something like that.

Interviewer: Did you find that guiding kind of burned you out of climbing?

Chris Reveley: Yeah, I was surprised at that. I thought, "Oh yeah, I love to climb, I'll love to guide." But of course it's a different thing. It's not climbing. It's teaching and being patient, those aren't all qualities found in great abundance in a lot of rock climbers. So it's a different proposition.

Interviewer: Do you have any good stories from your guiding days?

Chris Reveley: Oh boy, let's see. Invariably with beginners, and again I also guided in Boulder taking kids up the Flat Irons for their first climbing experience. And then that's why kind of Covington thought I was ok to come up here and be a guide in Estes Park. Invariably in beginner classes you'd get somebody to the top of something and they would absolutely flip out when it became time to rappel off, down the overhanging back side. I've had a couple of people curl up into balls and just wouldn't. In the fetal position, it's hard to rig someone up to do climbing for a rappel. So there were a few places where we would just gently tie them to a couple ropes and just push them over the edge and lower them down. There was no other way to get them down. Yeah, so a number of those things. Other guiding experiences, mostly people were great, especially the people who were highly motivated to go up and do the classic routes in the Park. They would just have a great time. That felt more like climbing to me. And then of course guiding people up Longs Peak, if you have a group of say six to ten people, invariably there's going to be somebody who doesn't want to go on and people become very emotional and you see all their best and worst sides come out in them. My undergraduate degree was in psychology and I was glad that my undergraduate degree was in psychology. It would help me understand how to motivate people a little bit and get them to the top if they really wanted to go there.

Interviewer: When you were guiding were you one of the guys living on Komito's floor?

Chris Reveley: Yes, Komito's house and his shop were the center of the universe. Duncan Ferguson and his girlfriend, Carol Peterson, lived in one room in Komito's basement. I don't know if you've ever seen that house, not very big. There are these little sort of paper laminate walls in between the rooms and then I lived in the outer room. Then there was a parade of climbing luminaries. We didn't know they were climbing luminaries at the time, but turns out they were. Hidetaka Suzuki and his wife lived there for a while. Reinhard Karl, who was a great German climber and shortly thereafter killed on Cho Oyu, came through. A lot of the California guys would stay there; you know Bachar and John Long and people who just needed a place to live for a short period of time. So people cycled through there and we kind of, they'd either be sleeping on Komito's living room floor. when we got up in the morning to make breakfast before going to work, or they'd be tenting in the back yard. So between his house and the shop, which was right down the street at the old National Park Headquarters, on the curve by the donut shop. Between those two places, that's where it was happening.

Interviewer: So this was the late '70s and it sounds like it was kind of a communal living situation. I bet that was pretty wild at times.

Chris Reveley: Yeah, yeah, it was. Everybody sort of worked it out. I don't remember one bit of conflict really. There was no territoriality and that started in about '75. Duncan was working for Steve, he wasn't guiding. He and Carol were the "Shop Dogs" at the time. Fixing climbing shoes and resoling climbing shoes. I don't think Duncan was ever interested in guiding, he might have done a little bit of that, but not as a living.

Interviewer: How did you get introduced into this scene?

Chris Reveley: George Hurley knew Covington, and Covington called him and said, "We're really busy, we need help." He said, "Well, this friend of mine and I could come up." And he said, "That'd be great, who is it?" And he told him and off we went and worked on and off for that first summer. After that it became pretty clear that I was going to be able to work much of the year, so I pretty much moved up here.

Interviewer: So you were guiding during the summer and then you were in school during the winter or were you doing other things in the winter or were you guiding through the winter? [laughter] What were you doing in the winter?

Chris Reveley: It gets a little hazy. I think I quit college for the first time; it took me seven and a half years to get an undergraduate degree. I think I quit college for the first time in '73 to go climbing. So I would go to Yosemite in the spring for a month or two and then guide for the summer and then go back to Yosemite for a month or so in the fall. Ultimately I ended up taking correspondence classes and they finally notified me that I had graduated in December of 1977. I think mostly what I was doing was, I was taking

classes occasionally and working all the time. I always had a job to make money to go to Yosemite in the spring and the fall. Yeah, that's hard to say if there was one sort of dominate theme running throughout, other than rock climbing.

Interviewer: So you were pretty much a committed rock climber.

Chris Reveley: I would say so. Yeah, that was the only thing that seemed worth doing.

Interviewer: So how did you end up becoming a ranger?

Chris Reveley: Part of what would happen in those days, and I assume still does, is that the Park Service would call people who kind of knew what they were doing, for technical rescues. They didn't have a lot of people who did that, and further more a lot of the rangers who did that were kind of old and they really didn't want to do it anymore. So they would recruit people like me and Westbay and Doug Snively, Billy Westbay and Doug Snively, and Duncan Ferguson and anybody who happened to be around that had technical climbing experience to do some of these searches and evacuations in difficult places. And man, we were making like \$12.00 an hour, we thought we were getting rich. [laughter] So we would go out and help them with rescues and searches and that kind of stuff.

Interviewer: That's kind of how you got to know people in the Park Service?

Chris Reveley: Yeah, and Bob Sievert was the South District Ranger at the time. No, the Wild Basin District Ranger and I had worked with him in a number of search and rescue missions. And at one point he said, "Well you ought to apply to work for the Park." And I said, "Ok, I'm a little burned out on this guiding thing, maybe I'll do that." He said he had to justify passing 120 people on the Federal Hiring Register to get to me, because I hadn't been real forthcoming about, I hadn't been very good at lying on my application to position myself in the hierarchy. When you fill out his Federal application, somebody sitting at a desk at Washington that has roles and he or she is just grading it and gives you a score. So if you claim that you have been to the Space Station and back and you soloed Everest three times, they go, "Ok, that's pretty good," and they'll give you a score. And your score will be better. So I wasn't very good at presenting myself, I'll put it that way. But he did reach me on the Hiring Register and I worked at Longs Peak for four years.

Interviewer: What were your duties as a Ranger?

Chris Reveley: In those days, it's not the case now, but in those days the Ranger that worked at Longs Peak pretty much only worked at Longs Peak. So there was a rotation you were supposed to be in where you did the "front country" stuff, as they call it, which was managing hundreds of people in the parking, managing the camp ground, which was at the time a tents only camp ground. I think it still is actually. Then there were hiking days

that you were supposed to take, where you got to go up the trail. Well, not to long into every season, people were a little bit burned out on going up the trail every day, of course that's all I wanted to do. So there was this sort of shifting, so I ended up maybe working in the campground one day a week in the Front Country and then going up the trail every morning to the top of Longs Peak most of the time for the rest of the week. My job, obsessively was to contact visitors, be available for emergency situations and so I carried a radio, and little else.

Interviewer: And so you would go up and down Longs often, like daily almost?

Chris Reveley: At times maybe three or four times a week.

Interviewer: Did you ever bivy up there as a Ranger?

Chris Reveley: Yeah, they had, there was the original Chasm Meadow shelter cabin, which was wiped off the face of the earth by an avalanche coming out of the loft between Longs and Meeker, a few seasons ago. But it was such a great classical stone cabin. It had a Dutch door and these little bunks inside and it was all fitted out for people to emergency bivouac, spend the night there. Sleeping bags, rescue equipment for anything that might happen up on climbs above that. So we would go up there and spend the night and it was magical. You'd open the doors, the Dutch door and just lean out there, and you could watch the thunder storms out on the plains to the east. It looked like Star Wars, it was amazing.

Interviewer: Do you have any memorable stories from being a guide?

Chris Reveley: A guide?

Interviewer: I'm sorry, a Ranger.

Chris Reveley: Oh yeah. Not all of them good. Our job was to, among other things, was to pick up the dead and injured. And we did a fair amount of that compared to most parks. I tried to combine climbing as much as I could with rangers. I think the day that Duncan Ferguson and I did the first ascent of the Casual Route on the east face of the Diamond, I think that was a work day for me as I recall. Pretty good work day. Yeah, some of those horrible events kind of stick in your mind. People falling all the way down Lamb's Slide and kids who were killed going up easy routes on the Peak. I guess the advantage from the point of view of the Park Service, and the reason they didn't kind of reign me in a little more on the way I would travel around the back country, which was extremely light. Often with nothing but a fanny pack with a radio in it, is that I could get to places really quickly. So the day that Matt Strickler broke his back falling off of the traverse of the Casual Route, I was in the Boulder Field. I went over the Camel, down that gulley, climbed the North Chimney and I was on Broadway where he had been lowered probably within 45 minutes. So

rapid response with a radio was important and I think it's probably still a good model for how to respond to back country emergency.

Interviewer: So you mentioned the Casual Route, you got the first ascent on that which is probably one of the most sought after high alpine routes in the country, maybe even in the world. What was that like?

Chris Reveley: Duncan had been up there before, maybe more than once. And the climb starts off of Broadway with a couple of pitches of relatively easy stuff. Then there's this sort of sea of gray rock out to the left, and his intention was to connect that little crack system which actually continues up D-1 with those grand traverse dihedrals that come down over here. And that turned out to be the key to the whole thing. He had gone high, higher than we ended up going and had backed off of it, cause there wasn't any protection out there. So the day we went up, he ever the optimist, he said, "Well I tried up high so why don't you try traversing somewhere else." [laughter] One thing led to another and I got across the traverse of one lovely little nut as protection. That was the frightening part of the climb. Not technically hard of course, but basically it was a 300' death fall if you came off. Of course after you get over there, then the climbing is classic and clean and gorgeous the rest of the way.

Interviewer: What time of the year was this?

Chris Reveley: It was, boy a good question, probably in July. One feature of that section of rock was that, of course nobody had climbed out there ever, so there were lots of wobbly little flakes and what not. I did the climb again a couple of years ago, Harry Kent and I went back and did the climb for the first time in 30 years, and it's much cleaner. People have, the traverse is just boom, boom, boom. All the rocks there are solid. They've pounded lost arrow pitons to some of those things, so it's quite well protected now and it was just a pleasure. I'd gone up there with a lot of trepidation, cause I remembered what it was like, and I didn't want to go out there. I said, "Harry I have to lead this pitch." It turns out to be quite pleasant now, whereas then it was not very pleasant.

Interviewer: You did the first ascent of the Casual Route and then you've only done it one other time?

Chris Reveley: I think that's right. Oh no, I take it back, I take it back. Chris Wood and I one day in 1985 when I was back in Colorado, '86 back in Colorado after my first year of medical school, we got on our bikes in Boulder with all of our gear in packs, rode up to Longs Peak in the middle of the night, trotted in and climbed the Casual Route and rode back to Boulder. So that would have been '86, so that was the first time since then that I'd.

Interviewer: Is that called the “Longs Peak triathlon?” [laughter] I think there’s like a record about that. Like there’s people that are like setting time records, from Boulder. Were you guys the first ones to do that?

Chris Reveley: Probably, yeah, 21 hours I think round trip.

Interviewer: Twenty one hours round trip from Boulder.

Chris Reveley: It would make a great triathlon. You would have to swim across Chasm Lake.

Interviewer: There you go.

Chris Reveley: That would weed them out. [laughter]

Interviewer: So why did you call it the Casual Route?

Chris Reveley: We didn’t. We didn’t call it anything. The way it got that name was that a couple weeks later, three weeks later, four weeks later, Charlie Fowler, a very much up and coming and super talented climber from Boulder, went up and climbed it without a rope. I think that’s the story, yeah. He may have, somebody said that he had clipped into some piece of protection on that last pitch of that crux move. But anyway he climbed it without a rope and he trotted in there, did it, came back and was back by noon or something. I’m sure the story is better told in other places. And somebody said, “Well Charlie, what did you do today?” “I did the route that Reveley and Ferguson had done on the Diamond.” “Oh yeah, who did you do it with?” “I did it by myself.” “Did you have a rope?” “No.” “Oh, how was it?” He goes, “Eh, casual.” [laughter]

Interviewer: So that’s how it got the name, The Casual Route. So the Casual Route is one of the more, it’s probably the most well-known route on the Diamond. But you also have a couple of other free assents or first free assents. Can you tell us about some of those?

Chris Reveley: Yeah, the next one that we did was a route called “The Curving Vine,” which is kind of ignominiously sandwiched in between the climbs on the very left edge of the Diamond, Ariana and climbs like that and to the right is D-7. It was a route that Covington did back in the early ‘70s or late ‘60s. And it’s not the most wonderful natural line but it was in the guide book and so we thought that would be next. So Dan Hare, another friend from Boulder, and I went up and free climbed that. On the very same day that Duncan and Lisa Schassberger free climbed the Black Dagger for the first time. So we all kind of went up there together and I will never forget that moment, I was kind of hanging on down there, monkeying around trying to figure out how to do the moves on the crux pitch. I backed off and Dan ultimately led the hard part, but I looked up and saw Duncan pulling over that roof just at that moment. There’s a roof at the top of the Black Dagger that you chimney up inside the Dagger and then you lean out and swing

out around this thing, and it's as spectacular as you can imagine. And I watched while he did that. "Ok, well I guess they're going to make it." So that was a good day. Yeah, the Curving Vine and then my girlfriend and I, Dianna Hunter had been trying to climb a route called "The Directissima" on the Chasm View Wall. Here's the Diamond and the Chasm View Wall winds around here. It's below the Camel and those things. If you pop over the top you are in the Boulder Field. There is a very razor straight line called the Directissima that Kor had done with aid, maybe with Walt Fricke, maybe not with Walt Fricke. Anyway, so she and I had been up on that and we got weathered off of it in a horrendous retreat, repelling off of tiny little single wired nuts. So for some reason I ended up back there with Roger Briggs, which was probably only the third or fourth time I had ever climbed with Roger. We did the first free ascent of that which was a wonderful day, it's a nice climb. Then to the left of that there's a route called The Red Wall. This is in about '74 actually, '73 or '74. Bruce Adams, another friend of mine from Boulder, and I did the first free ascent of the general line of the Red Wall. So both of those climbs on there. And they are both really high quality climbs. I have not been back and done either of them since. As I recall, they were both really good routes. And then, the first free ascent of the Obelisk, which was a transformative experience for me.

Interviewer: How so?

Chris Reveley: Well it's the most scared I've ever been, except maybe on the south face of Aconcagua with Wayne Goss, later in life. George Hurley had done the first ascent. It's a big white corner, so the Diamond comes across and then it goes into a big white, slightly overhanging inside corner. You can see it from I-25 and it's somewhat different rock than the rest of the Diamond. George Hurley and a friend had gone up and done and done the first ascent of it. It was odd that nobody had done that until then. It was kind of pretty late in the game. And they'd gone up there and somehow climbed this thing on aid. George would never divulge how much aid they used. [chuckles] He never mentioned the size of the cracks up there either, when I asked him if he thought it would be free climbable, all he said was, "Well, there's some wide cracks up there." So I recruited another old acquaintance of mine from Eldorado Springs, a guy named Billy Roos. Cause I hadn't seen Billy in a long time and we had some history and it was good to be up there with him. He was a guy with lots and lots of mountaineering experience, a good rock climber. I said, "Well I've got this thing I want to try and do on the Diamond, are you interested?" And he said, "Oh sure." Without even asking me what it was. [chuckles] That was an epic day. We started off; I don't remember whether we bivouacked or hiked in, I'm thinking we maybe hiked in. He could fill that in. You approach the base of the Obelisk across these rising set of ledges, not very hard, it's like 5.6 or something to get right to the base. There are other more difficult approaches. So I was kind of leading out over this wet black

stuff, the rock isn't great. It's right under the Window and climbs like that. It was early enough in the season, so there were lots of big ice chunks lodged in these corners above us. I was, I don't know, maybe 60' from him and he's on belay on this little spot on this tiny ledge. We are making our way to the base of the Obelisk, and all of a sudden we hear this kind of wrenching sound above us. And all I remember is him as saying "Hold." So I held on and I looked over at him and this ice block had fallen out of the crack and I thought he was dead. I thought he was dead! [Chris Reveley speaking with great emotion.] But the ice block hit a ledge right above him and shattered into a million pieces. And I looked over and he was bathed in this light of a thousand chunks of ice. It just engulfed him. It was like the old transporter scenes in Star Trek where suddenly the sort of crinkly curtain falls around you and he just leaned down and he was just there to take the hit. I said, "Oh F*** here we go." And nothing. And I said, "You ok?" He goes, "yeah, fine." Went on and did the climb. [laughter] So this day is full of moments like that. They are just burned in my memory. So we got over to the corner and I looked up at this thing and said, "God, no." But Duncan had been up there and he came back to Kimoto's house after this and I said, "What did you do today?" And he said, "Oh we went up," I don't know who he was with, but "Went up and took a look at the Obelisk." I said, "Oh, what do you think?" He said, "Well, I think it's important to leave something for the next generation." I said, "Oh god." But at that point I was just, when Duncan said something like that, I knew that it was serious business but I also knew that I had to go up there. [chuckles] So we got over the base of the corner and I climbed up about 30' and got a piece of gear in and down climbed that section and it's just a big inside corner. It was just some sort of a little cam hexcentric underneath a little overlap. Didn't look like it was worth anything at all, and I got down to a ledge and I looked at Roos and I just thought, "Ok," and I put my weight on this thing. If it pops out we're done. I put my weight on it, more weight and it held. I said, "S***." [laughter] Anyway, I went up and did the pitch which was probably the technical crux of the climb. It's just grinding way, lye backing and I guess subsequently have gone on the left wall and climbed a straight in crack that they claim is 5.11. A really classic just straight in hands and _____ route that peters out. Then they get back in the corner. I stayed right in the corner stemming out to the crack when I finally could, which was probably harder, or so they claim these days. And hanging on trying to put protection in. And then we got up to the first belay where, I think it was first belay, where George Hurley had put in a bolt on his first ascent. Not only was it a bolt, it was a little quarter inch bolt with a Gerry Deathhanger on it. I don't know if you know what those are, but it was a little tear shaped thing that; the physics of it are such that if you put weight on it, it preys the bolt out. [laughter] "Really, George?" So anyway, we had a good laugh about that. I really wasn't laughing at that moment, because what was leaning out above me was a corner, in the main corner,

and then stepped off from that was an off width crack that would prove to be the sort of the, not the technical crux, but the psychological crux of the climb.

Another thing that just cracked me up, Bill Roos was a good rock climber but he knew his limits. So I finished that first pitch and I got up there and everything was in. I had the rope, I was anchored well. So he had watched me climb this pitch and he yelled up at me, he goes, "Those anchors any good?" I said, "Yeah, tie that rope off for a second." "Ok" I thought he had to go to the bathroom or something. So I tied the rope off, [chuckling] I looked up and out of his _____ pockets come two jumars already rigged with etriers, slaps them on and he's coming the rope. You know, this guy. I needed to laugh and he made me laugh all day. [Again, speaking with emotion] That probably made the climb possible, cause when you're so burdened down by fear and loathing of what's above you, you really need a little relief. And I just laughed and he was the perfect partner. The next pitches went up the corner, of course we didn't have coming devices of any kind, it was all nuts. Big nuts, little nuts, cuts, hexcentrics, and stoppers. The climb as I remember, or the crack on that second part as I remember the geometry, the crack comes in this way and then a crack comes out this way. And they kind of meet in these plains of rock and it was wet. And I kept putting in these nuts, endwise things that were just kind of swinging. I wasn't great protection; I didn't remember having a lot of confidence in anything I placed on that pitch getting up to the off width. So I ultimately did get up there, it was a little wet in that crack. So I was up there all splayed out, looking down this line of gear that, you know when you are nervous and you don't know what to do, you kind of pull on the rope to make sure that it's running ok. [chuckles] I'd pull on the rope and all of the nuts would swing like this, like the brooms in the Saucer's Apprentice or something in the Disney animated film. [laughter] They all looked like they were about to fall out. I really didn't have any confidence that the protection was good up to that point. So I was all spread out and at that point you have to make the move into the off width. I was really kind of paralyzed for a while. At that time we had no coming devices, so I had tube chocks. Did you ever see a tube chock? It's basically a tube of metal about that big around and slightly beveled on the ends. They worked occasionally pretty well if you have an irregular crack. But that off width, that last hundred and so feet on the Obelisk is perfectly uniform. So I had a little bit of gear left. I had my three tube chocks over here and I knew I had nothing to protect that remainder of the climb with and it's a long way. It starts out with very steep, I don't think it's quite overhanging and glass. It's very smooth on the inside and so you gotta get in and just use pure off width climbing technique. I was pretty good at that in those days, but I was terrified. Cause I had this idea in my mind that if I had fallen off it was going to be a 250' fall and I was seeing the anchors ripped out where Billy was, and I remember just apologizing silently to him. Cause he may even have had a hip belay and that was going to cut him in half.

“Billy, I’m so sorry.” The other thing I did at that moment was to appeal to all the gods of climbing that I knew and every other god. I said, “Ok, try and breathe. What would Duncan Ferguson do here? What would Jim Erickson do here? What would Eric Higby do here?” I went through all of their, “Erickson, Erickson, he would talk to himself, he always talked to himself when he was climbing. Ok, you’re ok. So, talk to yourself, it’s a off width, you’ve climbed that before, you know how to do this. What would Duncan do, well he would kind of do a sort of a yoga breathing and try and relax. Relax, ok, ok. What would Eric Higby do? He would find a clever way to rest, that’s what he was really good at.” So I went through all this litany of people, my mentors really, and ultimately I don’t think any of that helped. [laughter] So I finally said, “Well, I’ve done this before, probably climbed harder things, I can probably do this again.” It was so cool because there was this sort of cool breeze coming out of the crack; it’s like this look into a million years ago. It felt like the mountain had taken this air in three million years ago and it was breathing it out. I was anxious and sweating but I was getting this cool sort of bathed in this cool breeze. It was calming to the extent that I could be calmed at all at that moment. I was finally getting tired in this stemmed out position. I said, “Gotta do something here.” Again, the geometry of all that, I reached over and pulled sideways on the off width and stuck my left side in, stuck my knee in and it fit perfectly. My knee had tightened up and I could almost hang off of it. When I straightened up it could slide easily.

And that’s all I remember. At certain moments like that you don’t maybe form memories. I remember flopping on to the ledge at the top of that off width, looking at the rope running down through the crack. My tube chocks are clanging melodiously at my side. It reminded me of those bells the yaks wear in the Himalayas. [chuckles] Maybe that was comforting too. I remember being so exhausted I couldn’t speak at the top and I knew I couldn’t speak because, Chip Salaun, who was a guy who hung out on Longs Peak at the time and did studies of the vegetation and the crack systems and what not. A lot of people knew who he was; he was an eccentric character, an endurance athlete, a climber. He would live up on those ledges at the top of the Diamond for weeks on end in this little hooch tarp. I was lying at the top of the crack and I looked up and Chip poked his head over the top and he said, “Did you do the Obelisk? Did you free climb it? Cause damn, I wanted to do that.” I couldn’t speak.

[This was a beautifully emotional and dramatic moment in the interview as Chris Reveley reflected upon the majesty of climbing]

Those kind of days, I think. In climbing when you are with the right person at this sweet spot, when everything works, there’s nothing like it. That’s why I went climbing.

Interviewer: I’m not sure I can follow that. So just too maybe get some, just a little bit of technical stuff. You mentioned like Curving Vine and the Obelisk had

had an assent, but you did something new. Can you kind of describe what your contribution was to it?

Chris Reveley: Well, they'd all been climbed; the Directissima, the Red Wall, the Curving Vine, and the Obelisk had all been climbed using direct aid. So from the moment I got into rock climbing, it was right at that change, that sea change when people like Erickson and Pat Ament and Duncan Ferguson were looking at all these horrendous climbs going, "I wonder if we could free climb that? I wonder if we could get up that relying on the rope only to catch us if we fall off. Wonder if we can get out of that without pulling on the gear, not resting on the gear, not touching the gear except to put it in? I wonder if we can do that?" That was the renaissance, that was the moment into which I walked as a new climber. So that's all I thought about. I never thought about just "Let's do a new route on the Diamond and we'll nail up the hard parts." Never thought about it. Doing anything but free climbing wasn't on the list of things to do. So anytime we thought about doing a climb up there it was to free climb and old aid route. Or to climb a route that had already been free climbed. Wayne Goss and Jim Logan did the first free assent, all free assent of the Diamond. So it was either following their tracks, and that really broke the ice up there. Cause people like Roger Briggs and I actually went up there once with Roger Briggs. Others had been going up thinking, "You know, this is going to happen, this is going to happen. The question is finding the route up that big wall." So when Wayne and Jim did that first free assent, the combination of the D-7 and the Forest Finish, that really broke things open. And after that, bam, bam, bam. You know how it goes in lots of areas other than climbing. Somebody makes a breakthrough and all of a sudden everybody can do it. That was the moment.

Interviewer: We talked about your climbing in Lumpy and the Diamond area, is there other areas in the Estes Valley that you, or up in the Park that you felt close to or you climbed a lot in?

Chris Reveley: Yeah, we went up to Spearhead a lot in those days and climbed up there. There was a funny incident that happen when George Hurley and I, early on in my relationship with him as a climbing partner, and maybe it was when we were both guiding up here. There was a climb called "The Barb" above there, which is a classic free climb. Easy 5.10 I think and I'd been reading about it in the guidebook, I said, "George, we've got to go up and try and free climb this thing, it looks like easy pickings, 5.7a2. They described the gear and you can get your fingers in those cracks." He goes, "Oh, ok ok." We made this plan, we were going to do it one week and then we had to put it off for another week. At the time it was a little bit of a competitive attitude about free climbing these routes. People wanted to get up and do it first. So we got up there on this gorgeous day, I mean it was a classic day in the mountains, not a hint of rain, cool, windless. All the way up Glacier Gorge in the dark, you've been there, it's just

wonderful. So we go up and we did it, we free climbed the route, and on the last pitch, the last hard pitch, I'm climbing along and there's a wire nut hanging out of the pitch. [chuckles] We took it out and I looked at it when I got to the top and it was stamped with the initials, DM, Dan McClure. He and his friend has been up there and free climbed it a few days before we had. I have never stopped laughing about that. We thought we were doing the first free ascent and they had snagged it a week before. It was the classic, sort of left a calling card that he got there first and left a calling card. [laughter] Dan McClure and Billy Westbay and Doug Snively were the leading lights in that faction of the climbing community in Estes Park. It was a little factionalized. I never climbed much with those guys; we were just in the same place at the same time. They were sort of the Colorado Springs contingent, we were the Boulder contingent. Sort of on a different wave length than they were. Of course, that's all changed now, now we are all just people who were there at the same time. We are all great friends. At the time there wasn't a lot of overlap.

Interviewer: Was it common to leave a calling card like that?

Chris Reveley: I would say, yes, if you believed you were doing the first free ascent of something. I don't think I ever did it but I had seen it done before. Put a nut back in there and get it good and stuck and leave no carabineer on it, suggesting that you had placed it and climbed past it and you had done the route.

Interviewer: So something else that you are pretty well known for around here is your Longs Peak speed record. Maybe you could describe what that is.

Chris Reveley: Yeah, Longs Peak, the trail from the ranger station at the end of the paved road up there, I think it's six or seven miles to the top. You go up through the woods, get to tree line. A couple of different options right at tree line, through Jim's Grove or over to the Chiasm Junction, then across to Granite Pass and then up into the Boulder Field. The speed record had always been established by doing the shortest way up the mountain which is from the Boulder Fields to go straight up the North Face. Up until 1971 there were cables there placed by the National Park Service. In '71 when this wave of "let's return the backcountry to its natural state," washed over the Park Service, the cables were taken down. They left the big eyebolts that the cables were attached to, but they took the cables down. Then it became a different proposition. It's five, fifth class climbing, I don't know, depends on whether it's wet or icy or not. But when it's dry it's probably 5.2 climbing. So people had done this before I happened on the scene. There was a record by one of the old climbing guides whose name I don't remember. Then of course Roger Briggs came along who way upped the ante. He was a track runner in high school in addition to being a leading light in the free climbing community. So he had gone up the mountain, up and down Longs Peak very very quickly. I think everybody was kind of appalled that you could go up and down Longs Peak in less

than whatever it was, two hours and twenty minutes. So that record stood for a number of years. When I happened on the scene in '78 working for the Park Service, I kind of became more, people, you heard about it. People didn't focus very much on this kind of stuff, cause really that's a pretty small pond. Even though you may be a big fish in that pond, as an old friend of mine said at the time, he said, "Chris, you know there are people in America that don't know what 5.11 is." I thought, "Really?" The same thing with that record on Longs Peak. It was like, "Yeah some guy went up and down it fast, that sounds crazy." Half the people probably didn't believe it. So that record was sitting there. So I was conscious of it the whole time, quite intimidated to be honest with you, quite intimidated. So intimidated that I almost never tried to break it. I had started running in '75, my girlfriend, Dianna Hunter got me my first pair of running shoes. So I had been running for a few years and after guiding here in the days I would run around in the hills a little bit. I'd run up and down Longs Peak a few times. By the time I got to the Park Service I was running, I had done the Pike's Peak Marathon a couple of times. Of course, Longs Peak was the perfect training environment, could you ask for anything better? Sleeping at 9,400' and running up a 14,000' peak every year. It doesn't get any better than that in the world of hill running.

So I would go up and down as I described before, just during my work day. Going up and down the peak frequently during the average week. I had the route pretty well figured out to say the least. I had names for most of the rocks along the way. I had a sense of what was probably the fastest line up it. I really never tried to break that record. I only tried to break it once and I never tried it again after that. Cause I was really in some sense, I think I was afraid of failing. Roger's record seemed so fast, I couldn't imagine breaking it. Finally, I got up one morning and my wife held a watch and we looked at the clock in the ranger station and I just ran up and down as fast as I could go. It was a nice day, there was a head wind. I went up the old phone line for the most part. Subsequent fast routes have chosen a better line, which I suspected was a better line at the time, but I never pursued it. I went up the old phone line routes. If you, starting from the ranger station it veers off of the main trail rather quickly. Goes straight up through the woods, cuts all those switch backs, gets on the trail past Goblin's Forest Campground and then it gets on an old climber's trail which George Hurley had showed me to go up through the forests when that trail veers off and crosses the brook that way and then does a long switch back that takes you above tree line back to Jim's Grove Junction. Through the trees, up to Jim's Grove Junction, through Jim's Grove and then across the flats above Jim's Grove. Now days, probably the more popular trail goes to Chasm Junction and then cuts all the way across the base of Mt. Lady Washington to Granite Pass. I didn't do that, I went straight up above Jim's Grove, which was the original trail. Then got off the trail and just "b-lined" right up through on the left edge of the Boulder

Field which lead in a b-line to the North Face and climbed up and down the North Face in the process. Got down a lot faster than I expected to.

Interviewer: You gave this speed ascent a go and you beat it. You only gave it one shot, you beat the record on your first and only try, is that correct? What was your time?

Chris Reveley: About two hours, four minutes, and 30 seconds up and down. Was like an hour and twenty some minutes to the top, I can't remember now, and the remainder coming down. My forte was really running downhill, I was pretty good at that. That's the only way I won the Pike's Peak Marathon. I never got to the top particularly fast but I could really go downhill. Yeah, I just gave it that one try and I suppose I could have done what people do these days and keep going back and keep going back. I just was a moment in time that was kind of sacred to me and that seemed good enough.

Interviewer: That record stood for a long time; I mean it stood for, up until like two years ago, right?

Chris Reveley: Yeah, 32 years or 31 years. But you have to put that in context. I don't think you can say that people were lining up to beat it. Again this is a pretty small pond, the fish weren't many and they weren't very big in that pond. There weren't people who were obsessed with this like a few of us were. It's only been in the last few years that it's really come up again, of which I've been really happy to see. To see some revival of interest in this kind of stuff. The other kind of aftermath of that, that I dealt with, was. I think if Roger Briggs had been working at Longs Peak after his speed ascent, he would have had the same thing. Is that people didn't believe it. I got that a lot. I mean, angry disbelief. I'd be working in the Ranger Station or something and people would come in and they'd say, "What kind of crap is that?" "Well, it's not." "Who did that?" "I did." [with a modest tone] "Nobody can do that." "A few people who can." [quietly] That was always kind of uncomfortable for me. I guess more of a reflection of other people's ability to imagine. Yeah, I was surprised by that, I guess is the point I would like to make. I was just surprised at that disbelief and the emotion that it engendered. Then I moved away from Colorado in 1985 to go to medical school in New Hampshire. I never really thought about it or heard about it much in the intervening years. Then a couple of years before we moved back here, there was some rumblings about people trying to do it, then off they went. It's been beaten by a substantial amount since then. Andy Anderson.

Interviewer: He's got sub two hours, right?

Chris Reveley: Yeah, broke two hours, one fifty six something. And that is wonderful, cause I'd always said, "Obviously someone is going to come along and beat this and when they do, this is going to be like the four minute mile being beaten on Longs Peak, if you could break two hours." What we had

always hoped that would happen on Pike's Peak, is that somebody would do the ascent in less than two hours. I don't think they ever have, but there he goes. I talked to him this summer, I said, "Andy, what happened? You beat it by 2 ½ minutes or something last year and then by another six minutes this year?" He's so sort of unassuming and humble. I said, "What did you do?" He goes, "I just trained harder." He beat the record on the Grand Teton shortly before he did this. So he's the man right now. It's cool because I liked it too because he's a Park Ranger, so it keeps the tradition in the family.

Interviewer: So you said you moved away from Estes in '85 to go to medical school. When did you come back to Estes?

Chris Reveley: Two and a half years ago, my wife and I moved back here from Salt Lake City. After medical school I did training, residency training at Rochester, NY. Then we moved to Salt Lake City where I got my first job in a hospital there. Lived there for, '93 until 2010, 2009, then we moved back here.

Interviewer: Did you purposely move back here because it's Estes Park?

Chris Reveley: Yeah, you know the old tribe is here, a lot of people who I climbed with are here. I mean Snivley, Doug Snivley, Harry Kent, Hornbein's here, Komito, these are all the people.

Interviewer: I know this because of just climbing with you, but you actually commute like six hours to work, so that you could live here, and go to your practice in Rock Springs.

Chris Reveley: Yeah, yeah, I work in a little ambulatory surgery center there. Before I was commuting 2 ½ hours from Salt Lake City. So we'd go up there and work for a week and then go home. I share the job with my partner, so it's a half time kind of thing, which is a nice schedule. Over the last year or so we've gone to a two weeks on, two weeks off schedule which allows you to do a lot more. But I'm just about to end that situation and maybe retiring. So no more commuting and more time in Estes Park.

Interviewer: You plan on retiring here?

Chris Reveley: Sure, yeah, yeah. My wife has taken to the community very very well to say the least. I was worried about that, but that's gone well. So I'm here with my family and my extended family. All these people that I came of age with, which is very important to me. That's why I'm here.

Interviewer: Very nice.

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ABSTRACT: Dr. Chris Reveley is a luminary of the Colorado free climbing community. His interview includes myriad of names of the pioneers Colorado climbing. Chris' climbing career began in the early 1970s in Eldorado Canyon and Boulder Canyon when he attended the University of Colorado. Chris became part of the Estes Park climbing community and served as a Ranger in Rocky Mountain National Park prior to attending medical school. He is credited with multiple first assents in Rocky Mountain National Park and held the speed record for the round trip climb of Longs Peak at two hours and four and a half minutes in 1979, a record which stood for 31 years. This interview is insightful as Dr. Reveley shares the deep emotions of the climbing experience. His descriptions include the fear, exhaustion, exhilaration, sense of companionship, and creativity associated with his many climbing adventures. Dr. Reveley retired in Estes Park in 2009. Note: added material appears in brackets.